

LITHUANIAN PROGRAMS IN CHICAGO

Lithuanians are considered the "most organized" nationality group. Each Lithuanian belongs from one to a half dozen, or more, organizations; church, lay, choir, political, clique, place of origin, or what have you. All of these organizations sponsor festivals. As a result every Sunday and week-end, sees a dozen or more festivals of every caliber, some big, others are small. To describe all would be an impossibility. However, an attempt will be made to report on some of the programs.

DARIUS-GIRENAS AMERICAN LEGION

The Lithuanian-American Legion, Darius-Girēnas, played host to 40 non-Lith legions. A program with plenty food and drink, was furnished at their beautiful headquarters. The program consisted of Lithuanian folk lore tied into a story based on romance. The narrator was the charming and skilled in this art, Mrs. Peter Daužvardis. In a delightful manner and with plenty of humor she tied together folk songs and folk dances into an hour program of sheer fun. The program wove customs into the story of a romance of Johnny and Mary (Jonukas ir Mariutė). It seems that in Lithuania June is not the month of the bride and weddings, but autumn is, after the crops are gathered and papa & mama can get along without their offspring. Mrs. Pieža with her enchanting voice and expressive face for mime, sang the proper folk songs to the expert accompaniment of Mrs. Leonard Šimutis, Jr. The ATEITIS folk dancers tied in with dances skilfully performed. Bruno Aldonis was their accordionist. The audience was very delighted with the entire proceedings and chuckled continually.

BIRUTĖ OPERETTA BY "AIDO CHORAS"

On October 12, the AIDO (Echo) chorus presented "Birutė" - an operetta by Mikas Petruskas (liberetto by Žemkalnis) dealing with the romance between Birutė and Keistutis. Their marriage resulted in the birth of Vytautas and these three names are foremost in the hearts of the Lithuanians. The Birutė was a pagan, a Catholic shrine was dedicated to her memory on a mount which bears her name.

Birutė was a daughter of a "Vaidyla" (priest). Her mother died when Birutė was young. Birutė's beauty was known throughout the land and even among the Teutons. A Teuton princeling fell in love with Birutė and wished to marry her, but none of his jewels could make her leave Lithuania. Nor did her brothers or the people cherish the thought that she would marry a Teuton, and a Christian at that. However, they turned to Lizdeika, the highest of the high priest (Krivlų Krivaitis) for his oracle. To avoid conflict with the Teutons he divined that Birutė was chosen by the gods to become a vestal virgin and tend the sacred and everlasting fire.

Keistutis, who was the ruler of Žemaitija (Northern Lithuania), chanced to see Birutė and fell deeply in love with her. During the day of Birutė's initiation into the "Vaidilyste" and as the sacred robes were about to be garbed on Birutė, Keistutis appeared once again and snapped the robe and casted it into the sacred fire. The people became horrified and fell to the ground fearing for the worst from an avenging deity. But one of the Vaidylas present, calmed their fears and declared that since such an incident took place then it must be the will of the gods. Thus, Keistutis and Birutė were wed.

The part of Birutė was sung by Mrs. Nancy Roman. Her singing was pleasant, but her acting was weak. How-

ever, when she fell on her knees in prostration to denote her acceptance of Keistutis, that part was so convincing and well done that it called forth a spontaneous applause from the audience. There wasn't enough of Sundstein, the handsome Teutonic Cross-knight who sought the hand of Birutė, portrayed by Roger Žilis. His was truly a charming voice. The parts of all singers was rather short. Vytautas Yudins, as the blind Vaidyla who sanctioned Birutė's withdrawal from the Vaidelyste, sang well in a wholesome baritone voice. It is regretful that he couldn't play the Kanklė, an ancient stringed instrument which he held in his lap. Keistutis (Paul Krauchunas) wasn't a convincing lover. The ritualistic dance of the vestal virgins with candles in their hands, processioning around the sacred fire (Aukura) (Choreography by V. F. Beliajus. Candles creation of Richard Misevick) added the needed effect for the solemn occasion it tried to portray.

The directress, Mrs. Dorothy Yudins, received many beautiful bouquets of appreciation, and she well deserved them. Compliments are in order to the superb pianists, Pearl Johnson and Helen Pechukaitis, who played excellently two-piano accompaniment; to the violin quartet, and to Mr. Joseph Dittert, the make-up man.

LITHS SING AT MEMORIAL FOR WAR DEAD

At the memorial services for the war dead returned from Hawaii, which was held at Soldiers Field during the evening of Sunday, October 19, Anna Kaskas and Al Brazis, both with the Chicago Civic Opera, were chosen to sing at the memorial service. Both have been receiving very favorable comments from the Chicago papers for their excellent work. Critic Claudia Cassidy, who thinks that "Opera descends into burlesque", found Anna Kaskas as one of the bright spots. Says she: Miss Kaskas as Amneris (in Verdi's Aida).... was by far the most imposing. She had the bearing of a king's daughter, the authority that goes beyond provincial training, and a warmly beautiful mezzo-soprano." (Chicago Tribune, Oct. 19, 1947).

POLYNA STOŠKA

Miss Polyna Stoška, Lithuanian singer, who gained renown in "Street Scene" of New York's past season, has signed a contract with the Metropolitan Opera co. She has been further honored by selection as one of the cast of "Don Giovanni", traditional pre-season charity opera.

BARBARA DARLYS

Barbara Darlys, Chicago soprano who sang in the Lithuanian National Opera, received praises of critics for her performance in the Polish opera "Halka" in Cleveland, Ohio, Oct. 19. She is visiting with her family in Chicago. It is hoped "Halka" will be staged in Chicago.

LITH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HONORS KASKAS

70 members of the Chicago Lithuanian Chamber of Commerce attended the performance of "Il Travatore" at the San Carlo Opera, in which Anna Kaskas was starred. She practically "stole the show". After the performance, Miss Kaskas was honored by the Chamber with a reception at the Ill. Athletic Club. Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Rudis were in charge of the arrangements.

The Chamber of Commerce, headed by President Stanley Balzakas, can boast of its interesting meetings. A guest speaker is usually featured. This year, a series of Lithuanians will speak. First speaker was Prof. A. Baliunas, recent arrival from Europe, who spoke of Lithuania's economic conditions under Soviet occupation.



THE STEPHENS SINGERS CONCERT

"LYRA"

A concert presented by the Alice Stephens Singers was given at the Lithuanian Auditorium on October 19. Above all Alice Stephens should be given a rising vote of approval for such a varied and difficult program. More of this cultural type of program should be given in Lith circles. Mrs. Stephens understands the possibilities of her group and does her utmost to maintain its professional standing. To this reviewer the chorus appeared tired; true, the program was long, but they have sung with more accuracy and vitality.

It was to Mrs. Stephens' credit that she was able to stage scenes from "Aida", "Plque Dame", and the ballad "Nugrimzdes Dvaras". These presentations were a program in themselves. Some selections of the first part of the program could well have been omitted. It seemed like a vocal recital rather than a concert.

Two exceptions to the rule were Mary Pukšmis and Christine Bartulis. They presented two duets from "The Marriage of Figaro". Miss Pukšmis seemed at least for the duration of these two numbers to have lost her tremolo, much to her credit.

The ballet presented by V. F. Beliajus as a part of "Aida" was exquisite and very well performed. This ballet was the best part of "Aida"; both Miss Pran and Miss Grig should learn to breathe and at least try to reach their high notes. In the case of both of these girls, they had full resonant middle registers, but their high notes were definitely flat and faltering..

Aldona Barcus was in good form that day, her notes were true and she showed good musicianship; we are sorry she has decided to drop her music career. God-given talent should be nurtured, not neglected. Albena Ruther was very good choice for the role of the shepherdess, she was clever and convincing. In addition to that, her voice had a pleasing quality. It is just as well that she turned away her "Dandy". Mr. Jacobs should make use of his diaphragm, then his tones would not be so nasal. Miss Barcus, Miss Ruther and Mr. Jacobs appeared in "Pique Dame".

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Musically, the climax was reached with the closing curtain of "Nugrimzdes Dvaras" (Words by Jonas Žilis, music by Stasys Šimkus). Congratulations should be given to Algerd Brazis for his singing of the leading role. He was superb. He was in voice that afternoon. His stage presence has improved immensely and he is sure of himself. The story itself was so well presented that we need only to listen to the inflection of his voice. The chorus supplemented his singing very well. In this part

Picture taken by Ed Manuskus during the Egyptian dance in the bedoir scene of AIDA presented by Alice Stephens. The dancers were Chico and Chabela Hernandez, Vyt Beliajus, Emily Mucha, Alan Kuper, Wanda Zallys Louis Mahoney and Eve Hurlbut. To left can be seen the head of the pianist George Lawner. Alice Stephens' back is in the center of the picture.

of the program the choir seemed to enjoy singing. In the past year Mr. Brazis' Lithuanian diction has greatly improved. George Lawner performed his duties as accompanist with ease. He is an accomplished musician and quite an asset to the Stephens Singers.

"Nugrimzdes Dvaras" was so well sung that some people were seen wiping tears from their eyes; the story touched the soul of each true Lithuanian present.



THE KEISTUTIS CHOIR CONCERT

"LYRA"

The Keistutis choir concert was given on Oct. 26, at the Darius-Girēnas Legion Hall. The choir, above all, should be given an "A" for effort. There was eagerness in each face, but they too knew that the program was slow moving. Maybe the restlessness manifested itself in the constant moving and swaying on the stage. We would enjoy hearing this choir at some future date: we feel they have something to offer, given the right chance.

Mary Pukšmis was the guest soloist. She sang with intelligence and musicianship. It was sad that the audience had to listen to three "Ave Maria", played by the pianist and violinist, before they could enjoy Miss Pukšmis' rendition.

According to the program, Mr. Anthony Giedraitis wrote the dialogue, composed some of the music, directed the dramatics, trained and at times directed the choir. He also sang the male lead. "Methinks the man trieth too hard" — Shakespeare.

The fantasy, "Tu ir Aš", seemed to be a mixture of choir and solo selections. The Lithuanian marriage customs were not even authentic. The action was supposed to have taken place forty years ago, yet, most of the characters wore a modern dress suit of 1947 vintage.

The ATEITIS folk dancers also appeared. By their excellent dancing they added one bit of authenticity to the program.



LITHUANIAN LORE TRIO

"Lithuanian Lore Trio", composed of speaker Mrs. P. Daužvardis, singer Mrs. O. Pieža, and pianist Mrs. Ž. Šimutis, appeared before the West End Wemens' Club secondoldest women's organization in Chicago. The trio gave a most interesting program and also presented an exhibit of Lithuanian handicraft. Subsequent appearances of this trio will be in Cicero and West Chicago. They are much in demand by women's organizations and other groups.